



NAVAL AIR FACILITY (NAF) EL CENTRO

E L C E N T R O C A L I F O R N I A

FACT SHEET NO. 6

JUNE 2005

Background

Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro is a U.S. Navy facility located in the Imperial Valley desert of southeastern California, approximately 11 miles north of the U.S./Mexico border. NAF El Centro provides facilities, services, and materials for training fleet air squadrons. The base operates one main runway, one auxiliary runway, and one area dedicated to helicopters. The forces here perform an average of 160,000 or more missions per year.

NAF El Centro's main tenant command is the Strike Fighter Maintenance Unit. This unit provides maintenance and training support to fleet replacement squadrons from both the East and West Coasts. NAF El Centro is also the winter home of the world-renowned U.S. Navy Blue Angels Flight Demonstration Squadron. Numerous other tenant commands are stationed at the base as well.

The facilities at NAF El Centro include a main base and two remote bombing ranges. NAF El Centro has an annual winter population of 1,500 and an annual summer population of 1,000. The permanent population here includes approximately 600 officers, enlisted personnel, and civilians.

Environmental Cleanup

The environmental cleanup program for the Department of Defense is known as the Installation Restoration (IR) Program. The purpose of the IR Program is to identify, assess, characterize, and clean up or control contamination caused by past hazardous waste disposal practices and hazardous material spills at military facilities.

Due to the nature and extent of its operations, the Navy has been involved with hazardous materials for several decades. Past hazardous material use and methods for disposal, although acceptable at the time, resulted in unexpected and long-term environmental problems because pollutants were released into the soil and groundwater.

At NAF El Centro, the Navy is the lead federal agency for environmental investigation and cleanup activities conducted through its IR Program. Southwest Division of the Naval Facilities Engineering Command manages the IR Program at NAF El Centro. However, other agencies—California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA), Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), Region 7—are also involved in the Navy's work at NAF El Centro (see IR Program box, page 2).

The NAF El Centro IR Program Team has fostered partnerships with regulatory agencies, including DTSC and the RWQCB (Colorado River Basin Region), the local community, and civilian contractors. The NAF El Centro IR Program Team and these partners meet quarterly to discuss current and proposed activities so there are no "surprises" during the work. This advance planning allows NAF El Centro to identify future projects and effectively and efficiently execute current projects using available funding. It also allows the sharing of resources among contractors. In addition, regulatory input is obtained at the outset of each cleanup project.



➤ Regional Location Map

IR Program Sites

The IR Program at NAF El Centro began in September 1987 with preliminary assessments that identified 17 areas with the potential for soil or groundwater contamination (see Site Location Map, page 3). The NAF El Centro IR Program Team has worked together proactively to clean up and close those sites. Of the 17 IR Program sites identified, six did not require cleanup. Another seven sites have been cleaned up and received official agency closures. Cleanup and site characterization is underway at the four remaining sites, with closure anticipated by 2011. This section focuses on work conducted at IR Site 10.

IR Site 10—Sewage Stabilization Ponds

IR Site 10, the Sewage Stabilization Ponds, is located just north of the currently operating base sewage treatment plant. Site 10 is six acres in size and consists of three unlined ponds with bermed sides. The stabilization ponds served as the only sewage treatment for the base from the 1940s until 1976. Domestic and industrial sewage flowed into Pond #1, where most solids settled out. The remaining liquid from Pond #1 would then flow into Pond #2 and Pond #3, and then to the New River.

Historically, the waste stream that went into the ponds included solvents and degreasers, fuels, oils, antifreeze, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from waste oils, and metals and cyanide from photographic waste. There are no records indicating that accumulated sludge from the pond bottoms was removed. The ponds currently are dry and partly covered with vegetation (see photo).

From extensive studies conducted in the late 1990s through 2004, the Navy decided to undertake a “removal action” (see box, at right) to reduce the possible risk to human health and the environment from chemicals in the soil at Site 10. The first step before conducting the removal action, however, was to study several likely options, or alternatives, for reducing risk. These are presented in a document called an “Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis,” or EE/CA. The EE/CA evaluated the two most practical risk-removal methods according to a set of criteria established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, including protectiveness of human health and the environment, short- and long-term effectiveness, cost, and state and community acceptance of each method.

On the basis of the analysis, the Navy has recommended Alternative 2. The California RWQCB and Cal/EPA DTSC have reviewed the Navy’s proposal and agree that this alternative is the best environmental solution for Site 10.



View of Sewage Stabilization Pond #1 looking west from the eastern berm.

The IR Program

The IR Program involves a series of steps to address areas with potential contamination. Under the IR Program, the Navy has a choice of two processes to follow: the *remedial action* process and the *removal action* process. Regardless of which process is chosen, comments from the public are sought and addressed before cleanup begins.

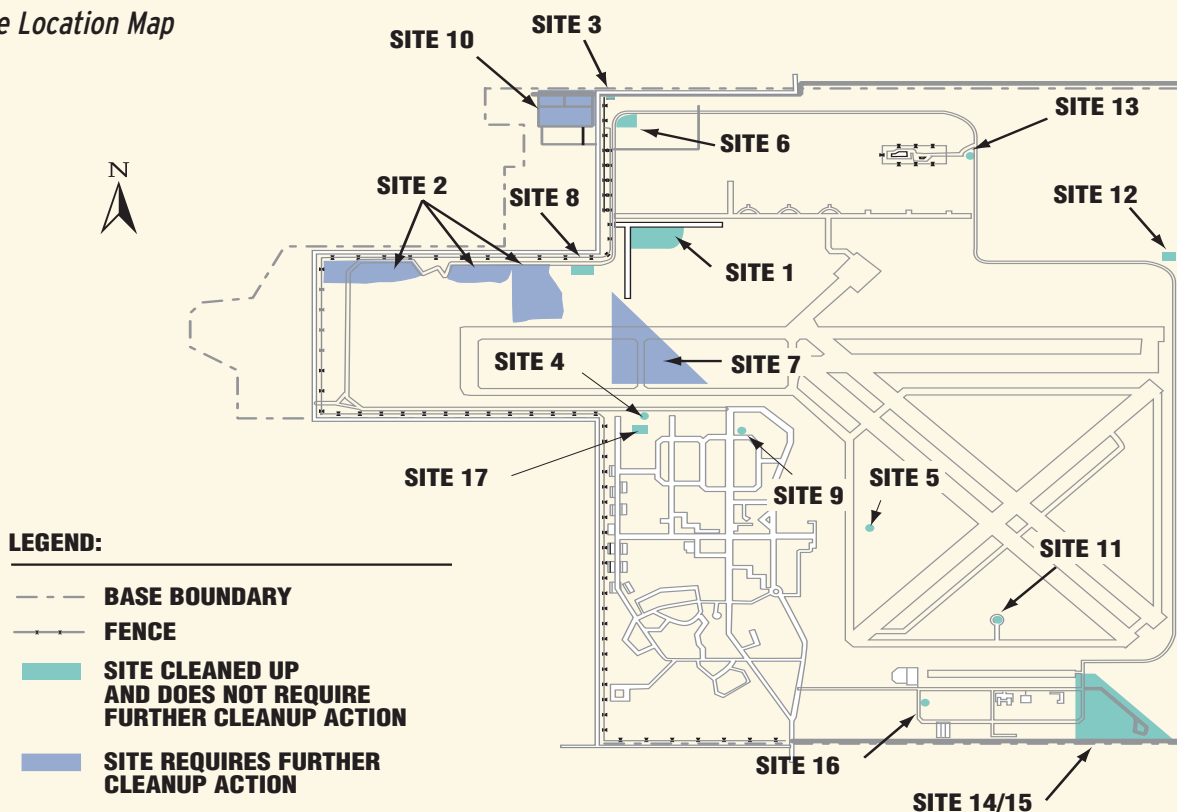
Remedial Action

- A remedial action addresses contamination that does not pose an immediate threat to people or the environment. This process is a long-term solution.
- At appropriate stages of the remedial action process, some sites may proceed to the removal action process.

Removal Action

- A removal action uses specific technologies to immediately reduce the risk to people and the environment. This process can be a short-term solution or one component of a long-term solution.
- The removal action process is being used to effectively clean up most sites at NAF El Centro.

► Site Location Map



| | |
|--------|--|
| Site 1 | Magazine Road Landfill |
| Site 2 | Patrol Road Landfill |
| Site 3 | Sludge Disposal Area |
| Site 4 | 4th Street Fire-Fighting Training Area |
| Site 5 | Fire-Fighting Training Area East of Hangar No. 3 |
| Site 6 | Northwest Fire-Fighting Training Area |
| Site 7 | Abandoned Fuel Farm |
| Site 8 | Scrapyard |
| Site 9 | Transformer Storage Area |

| | |
|------------|---|
| Site 10 | Sewage Stabilization Ponds |
| Site 11 | Runway Burn Area |
| Site 12 | Open Burn Pits |
| Site 13 | Old Incinerator |
| Site 14/15 | Fuel Farm (Tank Rinsate Disposal Area, Tank Cleaning Area, 8 Underground Storage Tanks) |
| Site 16 | Potassium Ferricyanide Spill Area |
| Site 17 | Fire-Fighting Training Area |

| Alternative Name | Alternative 1: Cover the Ponds and Apply Institutional Controls | Alternative 2: Excavate Soil, Take Off-site for Disposal, and Backfill |
|---------------------|---|--|
| What it Does | Places a crushed-rock and soil cover over the ponds; requires long-term maintenance and monitoring of the cover; limits access to and use of the site | Excavates soil with certain concentrations of chemicals; disposes of the soil off-site at an appropriate waste facility; backfills the excavated areas with clean soil; allows unrestricted access to the site |
| How Long it Takes | 3 weeks | 2 months |
| How Much it Costs | \$1.1 million | \$1.6 million |
| Permanent Solution? | No | Yes |

Public Review and Comment: The Next Step

The public has the opportunity to review and comment on the Navy's recommended action at Site 10. A 30-day review period will be held and a meeting to hear public comments is planned. This allows the community time to review the report, hear the Navy's presentation on the alternatives, ask questions, and provide input to the decision-making process.

The Navy and agencies will then consider the community's comments and decide whether to implement Alternative 2. Therefore, it is important to make your voice heard and to participate in the review and comment process.



Public Review Period: June 27 through July 27, 2005
Public Meeting: June 29, 6 p.m. at the
 Imperial Irrigation District Auditorium
 1285 Broadway
 El Centro, CA

Inside:
 Information on Site 10
 Sewage Stabilization Ponds

Naval Air Facility El Centro
 Environmental Division
 1605 3rd Street, Building 504
 El Centro, CA 92243-5001

The NAF El Centro IR Program Team is committed to involving the local community in environmental cleanup decisions. The staff maintains an open-door policy for members of the public. Information has been presented to the public through various media, including informational brochures and bilingual fact sheets, a speakers' bureau, public notices, and public meetings. In addition, the following web site provides information to the public on IR Program activities at NAF El Centro: <http://www.efdswnavfac.navy.mil/environmental/envhome.htm>

NAF El Centro and IR Program Contacts

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Information Repositories

IR Program-related documents are available for public review at "information repositories." Community members are encouraged to use this resource to learn about the IR Program at NAF El Centro. Information repositories for NAF El Centro are located at the following addresses.

El Centro Public Library
 539 State Street
 El Centro, CA 92243
 (760) 337-4565

Brawley Public Library
 400 Main Street
 Brawley, CA 92227
 (760) 344-1896